



**Start of James Karl Renner  
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LEO BAECK INSTITUTE  
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AR 11658

VI

James Karl Renner Collection, 2008

# THE AUSTRIAN HERITAGE COLLECTION AT THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE

## AUSTRIAN-JEWISH IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA

LEO BAECK INSTITUTE: 15 WEST 16<sup>TH</sup> STREET, 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10011, TEL (212) 744 - 6400

Name: JAMES KARL RENNER  
 First Name Middle Name Last Name

Occupations in US: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (before retirement)

Date of Birth: 6 7 1951 Place of Birth: NEW YORK USA  
 Month Day Year City Country

Prewar Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street (District, if in Vienna) City Country

Prewar (or Maiden) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Change of Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (during/after emigration)

1. Education: before, during and after emigration  
 (please if possible, indicate institutions and year when entered/left)

NYC COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY  
 30 JAMES STREET  
 BROOKLYN, NY

2. Were you affiliated with any kind of organization, before, during and after emigration (Youth, Sports, Zionist, Political etc.)?

3. Were you arrested and/or interned? (please indicate where and when)

4. What was your route of emigration? (please indicate places and dates of stay)

5. May we contact you again with a more detailed follow-up questionnaire?

(please circle)  
 Yes / No

6. Do you have any documents, such as photographs, letters, diaries, all kinds of manuscripts, etc., that would be appropriate for the archives of the LBI?

Yes / No

If necessary please use additional sheets. Thank you!

**JAMES RENNER**

395 Fort Washington Avenue

New York, NY 10033

Telephone: (212) 795-7830 Cell: (917) 533-3252

E-mail: JR6751@aol.com

Born in New York City James Renner moved to Washington Heights in 1973 and became interested in the local history of northern Manhattan. Over the years he became involved with various community organizations as a photographer. These organizations are Friends of Fort Tryon Park, The Washington Heights-Inwood Historical Society, The Harlem and the Heights Historical Society, The Medieval Festival, The Washington Heights Neighborhood Association, Arts Interaction, The Harlem and the Heights Historical Society and the Washington Heights Business Improvement District Management Association.

Mr. Renner has exhibited with the Washington Heights Arts Show and at Arts Interaction's Hintersteiner Gallery. The Fort Washington Branch and the Washington Heights Branch of the New York Public Library have been additional venues for his photographs. Coogan's Restaurant on Broadway and 169<sup>th</sup> Street has had an exhibition by Mr. Renner too. Some of his slides of the Fort Lee Historic Park are on permanent presentation at the visitor's center at the Park in Fort Lee, New Jersey. His photographs have been published in: The Washington Heights Citizen and the Inwood News, The Washington Heights Arts Quarterly, The Manhattan Heights Forum, Manhattan East, and Nous Tous, a French high school textbook.

As a freelance photographer he has worked for Manhattan Community Board 12 and the Washington Heights Inwood Development Corporation. His photographic knowledge of the Washington Heights and Inwood communities has been of great assistance to many community based organizations within Community District 12. He hopes to use this knowledge to increase the awareness of history and culture in these communities.

As a freelance writer Mr. Renner has a written interpretation to his historic and contemporary photographs. Some of his historical written work was published in the above mentioned community newspapers. Mr. Renner published a historical photographic book called **"Washington Heights, Inwood and Marble Hill"** from Arcadia Publishing.

As a member of the Washington Heights Neighborhood Association Mr. Renner has given historical walking tours of Bennett Park since 1992. He was also involved in the 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Battle of Fort Washington. This event commemorated the anniversary of the battle and to honor the placement of the plaque placed there by James Gordon Bennett, Jr., publisher of the New York Herald.

Mr. Renner was part of a mobile workshop which included a tour of Washington Heights called **"The Role of Immigrants in Making New York a World City."** The workshop was held in November 1995.

Mr. Renner's familiarity with other communities of northern Manhattan above 110<sup>th</sup> Street is well documented by his extensive research of the Harlem, Hamilton Heights, Manhattanville and Morningside Heights communities compliment his knowledge of Washington Heights and Inwood. His work is featured in **"The Manhattan African-American History and Culture Guide."**

In May 1999 Mr. Renner was sworn in as Community District 12 Historian by Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields and reappointed in June 2006 by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. Mr. Renner is a licensed Tour Guide in the City of New York.

## **JAMES RENNER**

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New York, New York 10033

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### **SUMMARY**

Careers in professional tourism and hospitality, community affairs, retail selling, customer service, photography and journalism with world renowned business and technology corporations and a proven track record in sales, managerial and consulting skills as well as providing for a marketing and public relations background. These skills have also appeared in community service groups where my experience has assisted in their endeavors.

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

#### **LICENSED NEW YORK CITY SIGHTSEEING GUIDE**

2006 - Present

- As a licensed sightseeing guide I have given and assisted with tours in the New York City communities of Washington Heights, Inwood, Marble Hill and Manhattanville. Familiarity with Spanish.

#### **34<sup>TH</sup> STREET PARTNERSHIP New York, NY**

2004 - 2005

##### **Visitor Services Representative**

- Assist visitors from outdoor information carts and booth at Pennsylvania Station to distribute printed materials about New York City's cultural, educational and historic landmarks and major attractions.

#### **MANHATTAN COMMUNITY DISTRICT 12 HISTORIAN**

1999 - Present

- Sworn in by Manhattan Borough President's C. Virginia Fields (1999) and Scott Stringer (2006) and report to the Manhattan Borough Historian. Community District 12 is bounded by 155<sup>TH</sup> Street Harlem to Hudson Rivers north to the Spuyten Duyvil and includes Marble Hill the landlocked community of Manhattan in the Bronx.

**JAMES RENNER**  
(212) 795-7830

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**MCGRAW-HILL BOOKSTORE**, New York, NY

1987 - 2002

*Sales*

- Assisted customers in locating book titles and placing phone orders.
- merchandised new products, updated current titles, replenished stock with new editions.
- Provided customer service and performed cashiering duties, including cash reconciliation, breaking-out cash, check and credit card sales and returns.

**DOUBLEDAY BOOKSTORES**, New York, NY

1987

*Sales*

- Assisted customers with book purchases and placed customer phone orders.
- Replenished stock with new editions.
- Maintained inventory displays for new and current titles.

**CBS**, New York, NY

1969 - 1986

*Photo Printer* (1973-1986)

- Collated orders for print distribution.
- Mixed chemicals for photo production.
- Managed semi-annual stock rotation.
- Performed general printing of photos and special photographic assignments.

*Mailroom Clerk* (1969-1972)

- Collated and distributed mail, operated postage meter for domestic and international mailings.

**FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER / JOURNALIST**

1975 - Present

Contracted photography/journalism/historical experience includes working for the following community organizations: Washington Heights-Inwood Historical Society, Harlem and the Heights Historical Society, New York City Community Board 12, Friends of Fort Tyron Park, Medieval Festival at Fort Tyron Park and Fort Lee Historical Park, The Uptown Dispatch, The Washington Heights Citizen-Inwood News, Manhattan-Heights Forum and the Washington Heights-Inwood Report.

**EDUCATION**

Associate's Degree Graphic Arts  
New York City Technical College, Brooklyn, NY

**COMPUTER EXPERIENCE**

Microsoft Word, Works, Excel

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E-mail: JR6751@aol.com

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**COMMUNITY DISTRICT 12 HISTORIAN**

- Sworn in by Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields in 1999 and by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer in 2006. The area representing is Community District 12 which covers in area from 155th Street, Hudson to Harlem River, north to the Spuyten Duyvil Creek. The communities of this district are Washington Heights and Inwood. I am also responsible for the history of Marble Hill which is the landlocked section of Manhattan in the Bronx. Manhattan Borough Historian Celedonia Jones supervises all aspects of my work as a local government historian for Community District 12.

**PRESENTATIONS**

- Historical talk given at P.S. 189M on the history of the community to a 4th Grade Class. Was involved with P. S. 132M's Centennial by being involved with a 5<sup>th</sup> Grade's Social Studies program. The outcome was a video documentary on the history of District 12. The air date of the tape was aired on March 30, 2004. Another historical talk was given at Yeshiva Raphael Samson Hirsch.
- Also have given historic speeches in 2002 at the Hebrew Tabernacle and the Inwood Hebrew Congregation on the history of District 12 and the immigration of refugees from Europe during the 1930's. At the 85th Anniversary of the opening of the Fort Washington Branch of the New York Public Library (1999) I gave a slide lecture of the history of the community.
- In November 1995 I was asked to be a panelist and tour guide for a mobile workshop called "The Role of Immigrants in Making New York a World City." This event was sponsored by the American Planning Association.
- Was keynote speaker for the Communities in Transition Series called "Community Dialogue," Mapping New Terrain hosted by the Harlem and the Heights Historical Society.
- November 2005 was asked to be a speaker at ACORN Foundation on the history of Fort Tryon Park and Inwood Hill Park

#### **NORTHERN MANHATTAN HERITAGE PLAN**

- This planning process was started by the City College Architectural Center in 2002 to evaluate and identify the geographical, historical and cultural resources of the communities in northern Manhattan with an inventory of a large complex area. Heritage area programs were conducted to promote the local history of the involved communities as well. The project involved students from the Architectural Center, community resources and local historians to collect information for the project.

#### **TOURS**

- I have conducted historical talks and tours of Bennett Park in conjunction with the Washington Heights Neighborhood Association and the Friends of Bennett Park on every July 4 from 2000 consecutively to the present.
- I have also been involved in conducting tours on the Washington Heights and Inwood communities. Also have assisted with other tour companies such as Century Walking Tours with Frederick Cookinham.

#### **TASK FORCE**

- The Manhattan Borough Historian has engaged the local historians to head various task forces. I am involved with three which are; Community names within the 12 respective districts of the community historians, Revolutionary War sites in Manhattan. I am involved in collecting information from the local historians for a website sponsored by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). The URL of the site is [www.oce.nysed.gov/nyshistory](http://www.oce.nysed.gov/nyshistory). The information to be gathered is from historical sites within each of the districts for events of these sites.
- **The Manhattan African-American History and Culture Guide** is a brochure published in 2005 and was presented by the Manhattan Borough President in collaboration with the Museum of the City of New York. I participated as researcher and writer.

#### **PUBLISHED WORKS**

- Many of the articles published have appeared in the Manhattan Heights Forum, The Washington Heights Citizen and the Inwood News, the Washington Heights Report and the Manhattan Times. Some of these articles are presently online and can be viewed at the following websites; the Hudson Heights Owners Coalition ([www.hhoc.org/hist](http://www.hhoc.org/hist)), Washington Heights online ([www.washington-heights.us/history](http://www.washington-heights.us/history)) and the Department of Corrections Historical website ([www.correctionhistory.org](http://www.correctionhistory.org)).



**EXHIBITIONS:**

- As a Freelance Photographer, I have exhibited at the following locations: New York Public Library-Fort Washington Branch, Washington Heights Branch, Arts Interaction, Dyckman Farmhouse Museum and The George Washington Bridge Bus Station.
- At the Branch Libraries the exhibits were of historical nature. These included; historic maps of Community District 12, the George Washington Bridge, historic plaques of northern Manhattan and general historical photographs of Washington Heights and Inwood.
- In November 2001 I curated an exhibit on the 70th Anniversary of the opening of the George Washington Bridge at the Fort Lee Public Library in Fort Lee, New Jersey at the request of the Mayor Jack Alter.

**ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP**

- Harlem and the Heights Historical Society—Board Member
- American Association for State and Local Historians
- Organization of American Historians
- Association of Public Historians of New York State
- Washington Heights Neighborhood Association

**EDUCATION:**

Graduated 1983

N. Y. C. Technical College of Applied Arts and Sciences  
300 Jay Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Associate's Degree. Majored in Graphic Arts.

## THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF WASHINGTON HEIGHTS AND INWOOD

By  
James Renner

The history of the Jewish in-migration to Washington Heights and Inwood is a rich and interesting subject. For some it is history, for others it may bring back memories of another era. What is about to be discussed may be offensive to some but it is felt that there are those who do not fully understand the impact of what really happened. There are those that would want to know and why it changed.

New York City has always been a haven for immigrants. It started thousands of years ago when Native Americans settled the area for fishing and hunting. In the 1600's the Dutch arrived and farms were started. In 1654 the first Jews came to New York from Brazil. Peter Stuyvesant was under direct orders to accept them.

Most of the land in northern Manhattan was owned by Jan Dyckman and Jan Nagel. Both men realized that in the future there would be a real estate boom. Over the next 200 years farms and estates were bought and enlarged. Such of the landowners such as Billings, Morris, Jumel, Straus and the Lords (of Lord and Taylor) had made their mark on the community.

There had been a northern migration of the Jewish population of New York City from the Lower East Side to Harlem. There were several reasons. First there had been better and newer apartments in Harlem. Secondly there was the relocation of the City College of New York (CCNY) where they could get an excellent education.

Between 1933 and 1941 at least 20,000 displaced refugees from Germany and Austria came to Washington Heights because of the Nazi rise to power. Anti-Semitism was on the rise in these two countries and had created negative effects among the populace. Emigration was legal from Germany and Austria until 1941 when war was declared.

In November 1938 was Kristalnacht. Many Jewish businesses and synagogues were destroyed or burned. Many Jews were mistreated and arrested. That evening had an affect on those who fled Europe and many who came were already traumatized by the incident. In some cases many of the Jews were forced to live in ghettos. A small percentage of the immigrants underwent the horrors of the death camps and survived. Many came to America after the war.

There have been many books and a film that have been released in the media regarding the Jewish immigration of Washington Heights. Manfred Kirschheimer came to the Heights with his family to escape the Nazi persecution. In the 1980's he produced a film called "WE WERE SO BELOVED" in which he recorded the memories of his family, friends and other members of the community of their flight from Germany during the 1930's. This movie was eventually made into book form.

"FRANKFORT ON THE HUDSON: The German-Jewish Community of Washington Heights, 1933-1983, its Structure and Culture" by Steven Lowenstein is a book that goes into historical detail about the migration and settlement in the community. Lowenstein talks about

the social structure and other facts about these immigrants and how they became accepted by the rest of the community and became an integral part of Washington Heights. The book is profusely illustrated with photographs, maps and graphs which enhance the story. I understand that there is a copy of this book in the Synagogue's library.

Justin Martin's biography "GREENSPAN: The Man Behind The Money" tells of the life of Alan Greenspan whose family came to New York City in the 1920's. Martin went into detail of what it was like to grow up in lower Washington Heights and how it influenced Greenspan as an adult. Greenspan lived with his mother and grandparents at 600 West 163rd Street. As a child he was good with numbers and calculated up to 3 digit numbers in his head. He played sandlot baseball and was a New York Dodger fan in New York Yankees territory. The Audubon Theater had been one of his favorite places to go. He may have even known Henry Kissinger at George Washington High School who was two years his senior.

The History Channel had a book review for "THE CONQUERORS: Roosevelt and Truman and the Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1941-1945" by Michael Beschloss. It was about the implementation of the reconstruction of Germany after the War. Part of the book examines why Roosevelt planned but decided against the bombing of Auschwitz.

Those who were allowed to leave in the beginning were fortunate. Others were not. To some the word "*REFUGEE*" was a word that they initially did not want to hear or acknowledge in the community. The integration process took on a more relaxed attitude in the United States than in other countries. This adaptation was especially recognized in Washington Heights. There had been situations where some rough edges had existed but had been smoothed out in time.

After the war things had settled down. A good majority of the immigrants lived initially in the lower Heights. Many of those had started businesses here in New York City. Many of the synagogues had flourished. Services started punctually, members had assigned seats, and there was the traditional practice of male officers on the executive committees until recently when women were allowed to serve on the board. Sisterhoods and ladies auxiliaries also played an important role in the affairs of the synagogues.

Yeshiva for elementary school students had opened in Washington Heights. Yeshiva Soloveitchek (1937) and Yeshiva Samson Raphael Hirsch (1944) had catered to regular educational and theological instruction. Yeshiva Soloveitchek had closed in the 1980's. Some of the students who attend Yeshiva Samson Raphael Hirsch come in from Monsey New York where some of the former residents of Washington Heights live. Hirsch is connected with the Kahal Adath Jeshurun Synagogue. Yeshiva University was also instrumental in higher education and theological studies.

As time passed many moved northward especially to live along Fort Washington and Bennett Avenues. The synagogues moved to accommodate the northern migration. The most influential synagogue (Kahal Adath Jeshurun) in the community was under the leadership of Rabbi Joseph Breuer. This influence dominated the community for years.

Over the years there had been a decline the original Jewish community. Most of this was

due to the fact that those who had arrived in the 1930's were getting older and their children moved out of the community to such places as Monsey, New York. This forced many of the synagogues to close or merge with others such as is the case with Hebrew Tabernacle and Beth Am. There has been an influx of younger generation who wanted to be a part and have a sense of community.

Two synagogues that over the years have seen a decline in their congregations are the Inwood Hebrew Congregation and Congregation Ohav Sholaum. Congregation Beth Hillel was another synagogue that was forced to merge because of declining membership. Congregation Shaare Hatikvah and the Fort Tryon Jewish Center are still strong and viable synagogues.

The Audubon Ballroom was home to another synagogue that closed. It was Congregation Emez Wozedek and had services from 1939 to 1983 when it was forced to close for lack of membership and the fact that the Audubon was to be torn down for the Lasker Medical Research Center which is operated by the New York Presbyterian Hospital.

Two other synagogues which had to reorganize were Congregation Nodah BI Yehuda located at 392 Fort Washington and Congregation Kellilath Yaacov at 390 Fort Washington. Many of the older members had died, some had moved to Monsey, New York with their children. These were in two identical three storied buildings built in the first decade of the 20th Century and were purchased and refurbished into houses of worship. Congregation Nodah BI Yehuda had merged with Congregation Shaare Hatikvah at 711 West 179<sup>th</sup> Street

These houses were recently torn down to make way for a residence for students and faculty of Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center. The building that was 392 Fort Washington was the former home of the McNally family. One of the sons, Richard J., was killed in action during the First World War on September 29, 1918. This information was confirmed in the historical signs section of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation website for the McNally Plaza. The McNally Post for Veterans of Foreign Wars is located at 584 West 183<sup>rd</sup> Street just east of Saint Nicholas Avenue.

Some of the more influential people who moved to and lived in Washington Heights and Inwood were former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Alan Greenspan Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Max Frankel of the New York Times, Psychologist Dr. Ruth Westheimer, broadcaster Edwin Newman and Hansi Pollock who was a local Democratic Party leader.

There is a small park on Cabrini Boulevard and 177th Street which is owned and operated by the Port Authority. Within this park is a plaque honoring a man by the name of Louis Stern. This gentleman was a member of the Washington Heights Chamber of Commerce and was listed on their letterhead in the 1940's. The plaque is as follows; *"THIS PLAQUE IS IN MEMORY OF THE SIGNIFICANT CIVIC ACHIEVEMENTS MADE BY LOUIS STERN ON BEHALF OF THE WASHINGTON HEIGHTS COMMUNITY. NOVEMBER 1969 PORT OF NEW YORK AUTHORITY, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF WASHINGTON HEIGHTS."*

Washington Heights and Inwood is presently experiencing a revival. New families are moving here from other parts of New York City. This is due to the fact that the rents and real estate in the area is much more reasonable than our sister community's downtown. Yet there is a

rising cost of rent and prices for co-ops and condominiums but comparing them to other parts of the city they are much lower. With these new people coming to the area brings a sense of stronger community ties and spirit that has been lacking over the years and is needed to make it the vibrant community that it once was.



**End of James Karl Renner  
Collection**

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